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Immigrant labor and the
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Immigrant Labor and the Restriction of Immigration

By B. A. SEKELY

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NATIONAL LIBERAL IMMIGRATION LEAGUE

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IMMIGRANT LABOR AND THE RESTRICTION OF IMMIGRATION.

*Submitted to the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce by B. A. Sekely, Field Representative of the National Liberal Immigration League,
June 1, 1912.*

During the last two years (1910 and 1911), 443,343 illiterate immigrants* entered the United States. This one fact, therefore, stands out broadly, that had the educational test been in force during the last two years, 443,343 immigrants would have been refused admittance. Of course, these illiterates could not possibly have belonged to the professional classes, nor were they clerks, bankers, manufacturers, merchants or dealers. It is also reasonable to presume that only a very small percentage of the skilled laborers do not know how to read and write. Thus the scope of the illiterate is narrowing down to the common laborers.

In order to get as illuminating a view on the matter as possible, we shall, firstly, investigate the results of the educational test by applying it to the total number of the common laborers who entered the United States in 1910 and 1911.

Secondly, we shall show how the educational test would have affected during the last two years (1910 and 1911) the supply of unskilled labor in the State of Pennsylvania.

Thirdly, we shall give a brief summary of the proposed various restrictive measures, which, if the educational test should become a law, the foes of immigration, no doubt, will push forward with the encouragement gained from a first victory.

* Annual Reports of the Commissioner General of Immigration, 1910 and 1911, from which other figures cited by Mr. Sekely are also taken. This figure was determined by the aliens' answers to questions asked them by immigrant inspectors, no test being applied. We have reason to believe that the actual number of illiterates over fourteen who were admitted during 1910 and 1911, is probably much greater than the figure given by the Commissioner General.

It will be seen that while the educational test would tend to stop the influx of unskilled labor, the other proposed restrictive measures would affect the same way the supply of skilled labor.

I

HOW THE EDUCATIONAL TEST AFFECTS UN-SKILLED LABOR.

ADMITTED IN 1910:

Unskilled laborers, including all common laborers, and draymen, hackmen and teamsters.....	215,232
Farm laborers	288,745
	<hr/> 503,977

EMIGRATED FROM U. S. IN 1910:

Unskilled laborers	89,527
Farm laborers	3,082
	<hr/> 92,609

Gain in unskilled and farm laborers in 1910.....	411,368
Male illiterates admitted in 1910.....	191,022
	<hr/>
Difference	220,346

These figures show that in 1910 the educational test would have cut down the available supply of unskilled and farm labor nearly 40%.

ADMITTED IN 1911:

Unskilled laborers, including all common laborers, and draymen, hackmen, and teamsters.....	157,066
Farm laborers	176,003
	<hr/> 333,069

EMIGRATED FROM U. S. IN 1911:

Unskilled laborers	174,102
Farm laborers	6,518
	<hr/> 180,620

Gain in unskilled and farm laborers in 1911.....	152,449
Male illiterates admitted in 1911.....	124,231
	<hr/>
Difference	28,218

The figures for 1911 show that emigration from the United States combined with the application of the educational test, practically would have wiped out the fresh supply of unskilled labor and farm labor. Had the educational test been in force in 1911, a new supply of only 28,214 laborers (this number including all common laborers, draymen, hackmen, teamsters and all farm

laborers), would have been available for the whole of the United States.

These figures also show that more unskilled laborers emigrated in 1911 from the United States, than came in, the number of those who entered being 157,066, and of those who departed 174,102.

The number of those who emigrated does not include those who went abroad with the intention of returning. It includes only those who left for permanent residence abroad. Therefore, in these figures, the influence of temporary conditions in the United States is eliminated.

Only by keeping our doors open to the deserving immigrants shall we be able to counterbalance the loss suffered through the constant emigration of thousands of alien laborers, returning for permanent residence to their own country. With this considerable emigration going on year by year, and the educational test applied, in a very short time a labor famine would ensue in the United States.

II

HOW PENNSYLVANIA WOULD BE AFFECTED.

ALIEN IMMIGRATION TO PENNSYLVANIA.

1910.....	174,877
1911.....	114,922

Total	289,799
-------------	---------

The majority of the immigrants to Pennsylvania belonged to the following races and peoples:

	1910.	1911.
Bulgarian, Servian, Montenegrin.....	2,895	1,365
Croatian, Slavonian	15,316	5,237
Dalmatians, Bosnian	626	349
Italian	43,747	30,749
Lithuanian	5,282	3,852
Polish	29,639	13,576
Ruthenian	13,386	6,902
Slovak	16,049	9,777
Total	126,940	71,807

In 1910 and 1911 out of the total immigration of 289,799 to Pennsylvania, 198,747, or 68.5% consisted of the above named races and peoples.

The percentages of illiteracy among these peoples were as follows:

Bulgarian, Servian and Montenegrin 40.8%, Croatian and Slavonian 33.7%, Dalmatian and Bosnian 38.1%, Italian 41.3%, Lithuanian 46.1%, Polish 33.7%, Ruthenian 52.6%, and Slovak 20%.

It must be remembered that the official statistics contain the percentage of illiterates only by race and not by occupation.

It is natural that most of the illiterates among these peoples went to Pennsylvania, and the professionals, merchants, bankers, etc., only in limited numbers. Consequently, it is safe to say that the educational test would have almost entirely deprived Pennsylvania of its fresh supply of unskilled labor. With the present scarcity of labor, especially in the Pittsburgh district, it can easily be imagined what labor conditions would be here to-day if the 167,205 common laborers, who in 1910 and 1911 settled in Pennsylvania, had been kept out by the educational test.

III

PROPOSED RESTRICTIVE MEASURES.

The foes of immigration are often extremists. Mr. Augustus P. Gardner said to the Managing Director of the National Liberal Immigration League in 1907, that there was no such distinction as desirable and undesirable immigrants. All immigrants were undesirable, including the English, the Scotch, the Swedes, etc. When asked who would dig our mines and subways, build our railroads and pave our streets, his reply was, "You and I; your children and my children." Their ideal measures for discouraging immigration are given in a bill introduced by Congressman Rodenberry, providing, besides the educational test, for the following:

1. Requirement that alien possess \$100.00.
2. Exclusion of aliens whose transportation has been paid for by others.
3. Requirement of certificates of good moral character.
4. Physical test equal to that for recruits for the United States Army.
5. Fifty dollar head-tax.

It is unnecessary to make any great effort to prove that these

extreme measures would stop practically all immigration of labor to the United States.

The total amount of money brought into the country by arriving aliens averaged about \$27.00 per person in 1910, and \$33.00 in 1911.

It is obvious that a \$100.00 requirement is prohibitive, as well as a \$50.00 head tax. In fact the present head tax of \$4.00 is already a hardship to the alien.

In 1911, \$3,655,513, was collected as head tax from the aliens admitted. Of this, \$2,277,311.78 was spent for conducting the immigration service. The Commissioner General of Immigration in his last year's report remarks truly, and with an unwitting irony, that "very distinctly the immigration act has become a revenue producer, the balance between the amount collected and the amount appropriated being \$1,080,721."

With reference to the suggestion of excluding aliens whose transportation is paid for by others, we merely state that in 1911, 281,718 immigrants admitted that their passage had been paid by relatives, and 9,965 admitted that their passage had been paid by persons other than their relatives.

The demand for a certificate of good moral character will only expose the alien in many of the European countries to acts of bribery of petty officials. It follows, then, that no reliance could be placed on such certificates. Money will buy such a certificate even for the criminal, while lack of money may deprive of it the honest and deserving immigrant.

The rigid physical test, which is not only provided for in the Rodenberry Bill, but has been strongly advocated by the Commissioner General of Immigration in his yearly reports, would in itself decimate the ranks of the alien laborers, irrespective of whether they are skilled, unskilled or farm laborers.

APPENDIX I.

ADDITIONAL FIGURES ON ILLITERACY

It is often asserted by certain advocates of the educational test, and admitted by some of its opponents, that a test requiring each alien to read a certain number of words is "milder" than one requiring him to read and write, and that the former would debar a much smaller number of aliens than the latter. Another widespread notion is that females constitute a very large proportion of the illiterates, as illiteracy is much higher among them than among males.

The following classification of the illiterate aliens over fourteen admitted during 1910 and 1911 shows that of their total number, 443,343, only 1.7 per cent. could read but not write, and only 28.9 per cent. were females:

	Male illiterates admitted		Female illiterates admitted		Total
	1910	1911	1910	1911	
Could neither read nor write	188,439	122,735	65,130	59,538	435,842
Could read but not write	2,583	1,496	1,988	1,434	7,501
Total	191,022	124,231	67,118	60,972	443,343

APPENDIX II.

ORGANIZED LABOR AND IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION

At its annual convention at Toronto in November, 1909, the American Federation of Labor passed the following resolution:

WHEREAS, The illiteracy test is the most practical* means for restricting the present stimulated influx of cheap labor, whose competition is so ruinous to the workers already here, whether native or foreign; and

WHEREAS, An increased head tax upon steamships is needed to provide better facilities, to more efficiently enforce our immigration laws, and to restrict immigration; and

WHEREAS, The requirement of some visible means of support would enable immigrants to find profitable employment; and

WHEREAS, The effect of the Federal Bureau of Distribution is to stimulate foreign immigration; therefore be it

* See last paragraph of the quotation from the Immigration Commission's report, on page 10.

Resolved, By the American Federation of Labor in Twenty-ninth Annual Convention assembled, that we demand the enactment of the illiteracy test, the money test, an increased head tax and the abolition of the Distribution Bureau; and, be it further

Resolved, That we favor heavily fining the foreign steamships for bringing debarable aliens where reasons for debarment could have been ascertained at the time of sale of ticket.

In 1910, the Immigration Commission issued a brief statement of its conclusions and recommendations. We quote the following from the conclusions:

A large proportion of the southern and eastern European immigration of the past twenty-five years has entered the manufacturing and mining industries of the eastern and middle western States, mostly in the capacity of unskilled laborers. There is no basic industry in which they are not largely represented and in many cases they compose more than 50 per cent. of the total number of persons employed in such industries. Coincident with the advent of these millions of unskilled laborers there has been an unprecedented expansion of the industries in which they have been employed. Whether this great immigration movement was caused by the industrial development or whether the fact that a practically unlimited and available supply of cheap labor existed in Europe was taken advantage of for the purpose of expanding the industries can not well be demonstrated. Whatever may be the truth in this regard it is certain that southern and eastern European immigrants have almost completely monopolized unskilled labor activities in many of the more important industries.

We also quote the following from the Commission's recommendations:

The investigations of the Commission show an oversupply of unskilled labor in basic industries to an extent which indicates an oversupply of unskilled labor in the industries of the country as a whole, and therefore demands legislation which will at the present time restrict the further admission of such unskilled labor.

It is desirable in making the restriction that—

A sufficient number be debarred to produce a marked effect upon the present supply of unskilled labor. * * * * *

The following methods of restricting immigration have been suggested:

- The exclusion of those unable to read or write in some language.
- The limitation of the number of each race arriving each year to a certain percentage of the average of that race arriving during a given period of years.
- The exclusion of unskilled laborers unaccompanied by wives or families.
- The limitation of the number of immigrants arriving annually at any port.

(e) The material increase in the amount of money required to be in the possession of the immigrant at the port of arrival.

(f) The material increase of the head tax.

(g) The levy of the head tax so as to make a marked discrimination in favor of men with families.

All these methods would be effective in one way or another in securing restrictions in greater or less degree. A majority of the Commission favor the reading and writing test as the most feasible* single method of restricting undesirable immigration.

Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of Labor, qualified the foregoing as the "most significant passage" of the Commission's report, in a leading editorial in the official organ of the Federation, for January, 1911. He concludes as follows:

It is to be hoped that all intelligent unionists will write to their representatives in Congress for copies of the "Brief Statement of the Conclusions and Recommendations to the Immigration Commission," issued last month from the Government Printing Office and which can be had for the asking. Let every active unionist and every local union also see to it that this information has its proper and due influence on the public through the local newspapers and on the local representative in Congress.

Now is the time to be wide awake! It was well enough to promote discussion of the question and to follow up through the years the development of public opinion on the subject, but now is the hour for action. Remember the forces we are obliged to encounter and let the campaign be quick, sharp, and brief. The enemy has everything to gain through procrastination of our law-givers in dealing with the subject.

APPENDIX III.

Extract from the report of James W. Kinnear, Chairman of the Committee on National and State Legislation of the Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, submitted June 3, 1912:

Our national boast has been that this country was the refuge for the downtrodden and oppressed, who in a healthy bodily and mental condition, and with a law abiding spirit, sought entrance at our gates with a view of making this country their home and taking their chances with us. This sentiment has built up our national idea of free Americanism. The immigration of the able-bodied and honestly inclined has contributed in a large degree to the greatness and prosperity of this republic.

In the line of our traditions and of the principle that has guided us in

*See first paragraph of the A. F. L. resolutions, on page 8.

the past, through means of which our country stands pre-eminent as the land of liberty and freedom and equal opportunity, we cannot afford to close our doors to those who still unfortunately suffer from oppression existing in foreign lands, merely because they cannot read, although otherwise qualified for admission under existing laws.

The proposed educational test, if enacted into law, will affect the immigration of the very people this country needs most, namely, the honest thrifty, industrious and self-supporting laboring classes; and in this respect they are harsh and oppressive measures.

When the various phases of this question are considered, we cannot but reach the conclusion that if any of the proposed bills, requiring the educational test for immigrants seeking admission to this country is enacted into law it will not only be against the policies of this country, under which it has grown to greatness, but against the interests of the Nation at large and especially against the best interests of Pennsylvania.

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